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World Chronicle

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1994: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

JOE SILLS, Spokesman for the United Nations Secretary-General, comments on a 17-minute video illustrating the major international events of 1994 as seen from a UN perspective. Peace-keeping and development are at the heart of all United Nations activities.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is a special edition of World Chronicle.

During 1994 the United Nations continued to maintain its demanding role of upholding peace in many conflict-ridden parts of the world. But more fundamentally, it had to fulfil its even broader responsibility of supporting development -- the world-wide fight to create employment and combat poverty.

Our guest today is in a unique position to reflect on the performance of the United Nations in 1994. He is Joe Sills, Spokesman for the United Nations Secretary-General.

Before speaking with Mr. Sills, let's look at a 17-minute year-end summary of major 1994 events as seen from a United Nations perspective. David Tereshchuk reports.

NARRATION:

1994: Amid the disorder and the conflict, the world's attention focused on efforts to uphold peace from the United Nations. But ensuring a world of lasting stability required a broader operation than peace-keeping alone.

BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI:

"Our final objective is peace -- peace through democracy and development."

NARRATION:

It was development -- the worldwide fight against poverty -- which demanded the bulk of UN work. It formed, quite simply, the UN's biggest challenge. While about 2 million people were killed in a year of armed conflict throughout the world, more than 13 million die annually from poverty-related causes. And in the UN's battle against poverty, the family gained extra attention in 1994. It was designated the International Year of the Family.

NARRATION (cont'd):
About 300,000 babies are born every day throughout the world. The world's total population of about 6 billion could double, if unchecked, within the next 50 years. More people inevitably create more pressure on resources, as well as more waste and pollution. By the end of this century it's been estimated that about 40 countries will be unable to feed their people from their own resources.

Such impending crises were addressed in 1994 at the UN Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. It took place in an atmosphere of great controversy: the Vatican and some Islamic countries were against the emerging consensus. But finally there came from the worldwide "Family of Nations" a call that individual families be allowed (and encouraged) to plan their size, for the good of themselves and of humanity as a whole. The costs of not planning were spelled out by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI (ENGLISH TRANSLATION):
"It would be the poorest, the poorest people of the planet -- and I am referring particularly to the situation of women -- who would suffer the most disastrous consequences."

NARRATION:
UN programmes were supporting communities all over the world in their efforts to plan family sizes, whatever the local cultural or religious background. Even in very traditional societies, like Yemen, education and improved infant health care enabled more women to chose when they had children. And more fathers were encouraged to get involved in this choice, part of a broad effort by health educators.

DR. MANSURAH:
"Slowly, by lectures and meetings with religious and educational leaders, through radio and TV, and through nurses and midwives, talking to groups of people at all levels, we have succeeded in convincing people that contraceptives are not religiously forbidden."

NARRATION:
Any slowing in population increase will depend on people's living conditions being improved. UN agencies helped with economic empowerment for women, as here in a Vietnamese family planning programme. A local women's group was enabled to get bank loans for their small businesses. This led to greater financial independence and, in turn, to smaller families -- just the combination which women's organisers hoped for.

MME DO THI THAN (ENGLISH TRANSLATION):
"This kind of project is very effective, and the two components -- income generation and family planning -- complement each other."

NARRATION:
One group member built up a fruit and livestock business and was able to reassess the family size that she wanted.

MME LE THI SAU (ENGLISH TRANSLATION):
"Because I joined the group they all encouraged me to plan my family. I have only two daughters. In traditional Vietnamese family way, my mother-in-law wanted me to have a son. But I have the right to decide everything, so I encouraged my husband to follow the principles of family planning."

NARRATION:
But life was often shattered by catastrophic events, as in Mozambique, and vigorous support was required. The 16-year civil war here left a quarter of a million children wounded, traumatized, orphaned or separated from their families. Twelve-year-old Virginia lived a nightmare. At the age of eight she was abducted by members of the RENAMO faction. Through the help of aid workers, she was reunited with her family, who had feared she was dead.

MR. MOVOTA (ENGLISH TRANSLATION):
"We were desperately worried, and we tried everything to find her."

NARRATION:
Looking out for children on their own was an extra task for UN peacekeeping troops as they supervised the demobilizing of government and opposing forces. Their mission ended with watching over nation-wide elections, the final part of a UN-negotiated settlement to take the country from war to peace.

The UN's work often involved such efforts to support the democratic process. After decades of pressing to end white minority rule in South Africa, the UN led the international team of observers for this country's first-ever universal elections. The nation's voters, of all races, chose Nelson Mandela as president.

NELSON MANDELA:
"I, Nelson Mandela, do hereby swear to devote myself to the well-being of the Republic and all its people."

NARRATION:
The new South Africa was welcomed back to its full and rightful place in the "Family of Nations", as its new president addressed the General Assembly.

NELSON MANDELA:
"The millions of our people say thank you, and thank you again, that the respect for your own dignity as human beings inspired you to act to ensure the restoration of our dignity as well."

NARRATION:
Elections took place in El Salvador as well. With UN monitors brought in at the end of the civil war, there was more stability in everyday life and politics could function more normally. Rival parties contested vigorously but generally non-violently. The UN was eventually able to give the results a careful endorsement overall.

AUGUSTO RAMIREZ OCAMPO (ENGLISH TRANSLATION):
"In spite of serious deficiencies of organization and of openness, these elections can be considered acceptable."

NARRATION:
Greater stability was also the aim in Haiti, once the return of the democratically-elected president was achieved, after his three years in exile. The police force was to be reformed and retrained with international help. This was one vital step along the road of recovery which the president proclaimed at the UN just before he went home.

ARISTIDE (ENGLISH TRANSLATION):
"We say yes to reconciliation, no to violence, no to vengeance, no to impunity, yes to justice."

NARRATION:
The growth of stability was crucial, too, in the territory which Palestinians were starting to administer for themselves, after their historic peace agreement with Israel. With UN help a Palestinian broadcasting station was set up for the first time, enabling the population to exchange news and views of everyday life.

Nothing could be further from normal life than what happened in Rwanda. In a wave of genocide, hundreds of thousands were killed. The international community, reacting with less speed than was needed, had to mount relief arrangements for floods of refugees into neighbouring countries. In the horrific disarray, efforts were made to try and ensure that nothing of its kind could happen again. The task for aid workers was huge.

AID WORKER:
"How do you not only immunize the kid against diseases, but immunize up here and help repair the damage that's done from being traumatized by seeing parents, families killed, by seeing uncles killing fathers, by seeing mothers killed in front of them?"

NARRATION:

The new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights made an early trip here, and plans were laid for a tribunal to try human rights violators. But the year ended with prospects still looking grim for many Rwandans.

An international tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was already set up, and its work got under way in The Hague, Netherlands, preparing the prosecution of alleged war-crime offenders.

On the ground in former Yugoslavia, the year began with some measure of agreement between Muslims and Croats; many divided families were able to re-establish contact. But Bosnian Serb forces still kept parts of Bosnia under seige, and the UN force remained hard pressed.

Towards the end of the year, hostilities increased dramatically. On a mission to Sarajevo, the Secretary-General warned that if the two sides did not come to an agreement it would be impossible for him to persuade the Security Council to keep the UN protection force in place.

In Iraq, the special UN commission set up to check on the eliminating of weapons of mass destruction presented a report which was largely positive. Perhaps most dramatically, UN inspectors had overseen the removal of nuclear rods from Iraqi research laboratories, and their safe transportation overseas. But the prospect of lifting international sanctions against Iraq faded, after the country's armed forces advanced once again toward neighbouring Kuwait, only to withdraw later.

And North Korea was the scene of a mission by the Secretary-General. The country was objecting to international inspectors gaining access to its nuclear sites. Eventually, the North Koreans signed an agreement with the United States, promising to abandon nuclear weapons development. An international consortium including Japan and South Korea agreed to help the North with nuclear reactors whose design would be restricted to peaceful purposes.

NARRATION (cont'd):

From throughout the international community, not least from Japan, there came calls for change in the UN's main decision-making body -- the Security Council. For three decades, the Council has been made up of five permanent members plus ten rotating seats representing different regions of the world. But in 1994 the case was being made for an increase, so as to reflect more fully the world's changing realities.

Preventing human conflict was a Security Council priority, but coping with assaults from the world of nature was also a challenge for the UN.

Playing its part in global efforts to react better to natural disasters, Austria suffered an earthquake. It was a simulation, done as a training exercise for relief workers from 28 countries.

1994 saw the first-ever International Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, held in Japan. The idea was to help developing countries especially, who account for 90 percent of the people killed in natural disasters, and who often have the least resources with which to respond to catastrophe.

The real cyclone which hit Madagascar in 1994 called for concerted action by the UN's various agencies. In the aftermath of severe flooding, they helped ensure that epidemic diseases were kept at bay, and that emergency food relief got through.

Vulnerability to environmental damage, especially from the rising sea-level, was a problem for small island countries around the world. For the Maldives, building protective sea-walls around all their twelve hundred atolls would be impossibly expensive. Such small islands everywhere need cooperation with other countries to combat global warming, sea-level changes and pollution on a world-wide scale.

In the Caribbean setting of Barbados, a UN conference on sustainable development and small island states represented a start in building a safer future for such fragile paradises.

NARRATION (cont'd):
More widely, the UN helped establish a universal legal framework governing how we can treat our seas and oceans as a vital global resource. The Law of the Sea Convention finally came into action in 1994, twelve years after being initially worked out. The Convention on Desertification was signed, one of the many agreements to stem from the 1992 World Summit on Environment and Development. Nations agreed to a range of measures to prevent the degrading of soil and help make agriculture more sustainable in the long term.

Global accord was also struck on trade, with a new General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, under which 124 countries agreed to lower their import charges.

At an international symposium on trade efficiency, the UN Secretary-General said that a world brought together by commerce would be inclined to peace rather than war, and that poorer countries especially could benefit from the new pact.

BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI:
"The volume of trade of developed countries will be 7 to 8 per cent higher than it would have been without GATT. But developing countries' trade is likely to increase by at least 14 per cent over the same period. A more liberal international trade regime is good for every party."

NARRATION::
The world-wide challenge of unemployment cried out for the international community's urgent attention. In Cameroon, a project with UN help enabled people to start processing their locally grown manioc. As a result, manioc flour was mass produced and sold commercially. The machinery came from another developing country -- Ghana -- and new employment was created.

Mass migrations, and the unemployment provoking many of them, were to be addressed at a World Summit on Social Development to be held in

NARRATION (cont'd):
March 1995. Social disintegration and poverty were also to be high on the agenda -- perhaps not surprising, with 1 billion people throughout the world estimated to be living in poverty. The perception was growing that such deprivation lies at the heart of much of the world's violent conflict -- a scourge which has taken more than 20 million lives since 1945, the vast majority of them civilians.

And a majority of the conflicts were within national boundaries. Such a case was Somalia. The United Nations presence there helped to establish some stability and to make famine a thing of the past. But factional fighting continued, and UN troops themselves became targets. UN efforts continued to encourage the creation of a new national government, but the country's divisions persisted. The situation was freshly assessed by a visiting Security Council delegation, and it was hoped that a stable arrangement could still be worked out, and the UN could withdraw in good order.

Peace talks in another long-lasting theatre of war -- Angola -- got off the ground once again, after previous efforts to maintain peace and hold elections had come to violent grief. Under UN auspices, the government and the UNITA rebels signed a new peace treaty. But no one expected the road ahead to be easy.

All over the world, whatever the difficulties, disagreements, or dismal prospects, the United Nation's fundamental responsibility continued -- to improve the lives and lift the hopes of all the world's people. As it prepared to enter its fiftieth year, the Family of Nations could acknowledge many substantial achievements, but also a daunting range of problems still prevailing. The work it faced in the years ahead was bound to be tough, and would probably be endless.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is a special edition of World Chronicle. Our guest is Joe Sills, Spokesman for the United Nations Secretary-General.

Mr. Sills, the video we just watched is understandably rather positive about the achievements of the United Nations, which of course were considerable. But if one

reads the editorials and listens to some of the comments made on the chat shows, it's quite obvious that a lot of peopl. out there are not very happy with the Organization; in fact, quite dissatisfied. How do you respond to the criticisms which one hears so often?

SILLS: Well, let me say first of all I'm happy to be here with you. I think that it's a pretty balanced video. I think it presents fairly the situation in the world and what the UN has done. I think the unhappiness of a lot of people is certainly in some instances directed at the UN, but I think that's more of a sense of frustration at their unhappiness with the world itself. The cold war ended. For years we had been dominated by nuclear weapons and the possibility of a third world war, and all of a sudden that seemed to be over, and people expected things to be much better much more quickly. And I think there was a great deal of surprise and disappointment that peace did not prevail in the world, that there was a whole series of nasty local ethnic nationalistic disputes that were held over from the cold war, and that the UN, as well as the different regional organizations with whom we're working, has not been successful in dealing with them. And I think that's a very fair comment, that we have many problems that the international community and the Member States of the UN are not dealing with successfully. So I see that frustration, I sense that frustration, I hear it just as you do, but I think it's with the world we live in right now, largely.

LITTLEJOHNS: A lot of criticism has also been directed at the UN because of the situation in Bosnia. It doesn't seem to have quite gotten a handle on it. What about that?

SILLS: Well, I think that's a very good example of what I said about a hold-over problem from the cold war. If you look at what the UN is trying to do there, if you look at the mandate of the United Nations and the resources that have been supplied to it, I think it's evident that the UN has a great many accomplishments, not the least of which is keeping a couple of million people alive that would have been in extremely difficult circumstances without what we're doing. But have been able to solve the situation? Have we been able to stop the war and stop the fighting? We've worked very hard with the regional organization -- with NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization -- and we have not been able to do so. So this is an example where the efforts of the UN have been only a limited success.

LITTLEJOHNS: As we record this programme, there's the possibility being raised that UN troops may be pulled out of Bosnia, out of former Yugoslavia. What contingency plan is being made for --

SILLS: Well, we're working very hard on contingency plans for that. We're meeting with NATO on a regular basis to draw up the contingency plans, and they are

being put together. They're very good, they're very solid plans. I think, though, it's important to note that -- again, as of the time we're recording this -- no one has expressed an indication that they want to pull their troops out. The Secretary-General said very firmly Friday of last week that he wants us to stay in there, that we still have a job to do, and we all hope that that will be the case. But yes, contingency plans are being drawn up for this.

LITTLEJOHNS: I was struck in the video we've just watched by the statement that, while 2 million people were killed in conflicts, 13 million died as the result of poverty. And of course the Secretary-General has issued an Agenda for Development in addition to his Agenda for Peace, but the Agenda for Development, unlike the Agenda for Peace, seems to have fallen with a dull thud; in other words, it hasn't made a great impact. What can be done to generate more interest in this question?

SILLS: Well, development is at the heart of everything we're doing, and the Secretary-General, as you saw in that clip, mentioned the combination of democracy and development which is the theme that he likes to draw, that people need to be empowered, they need to be in control of their own situation, and then they need to have the leadership and the resources to deal with the problems of poverty which continue in much of the world today. The Agenda for Peace, in which the Secretary-General proposed a new structure for UN peace-keeping, came at a very key time, and it was very well received. It had a lot of new ideas --

LITTLEJOHNS: After the summit meeting of the Security Council.

SILLS: Right. It had a lot of new ideas in it. You're absolutely fair to say that that received more attention than the Agenda for Development. I don't think, though, the Agenda for Development fell with a dull thud. I think it will have a long-running effect, and I think it has given a framework for looking at development. But there is a question, a very central question on development, and that's the shortage of resources. Many of the traditional donor countries face great problems in their own budgets. The question that we're facing is both how do we reorganize and restructure and redefine development, and then how do we pay for it.

LITTLEJOHNS: Speaking of the shortage of resources, the United Nations has been having problems all year with the arrears of Member States. Is there anything that can be done to persuade some of them to come up with some money, if they can't pay the whole amount?

SILLS: Well, it's not just problems this year, it's been problems for a number of years, and in fact we have made some progress this year, particularly with the payments of arrearages of one Member State, the United States. We continue to point to the

fact -- and this is the central fact -- that everything we do in the UN is mandated by the Member States. They tell us what to do, they tell us what our programmes should be, and we think they have a responsibility --

LITTLEJOHNS: And then don't come up with the money to do it.

SILLS: Exactly. We think they have a responsibility to give us the money to pay for them. If they don't want us to do these things, if they don't want to pay the money, then don't ask us to do them. All we can do is encourage, plead, cajole, not threaten, because we have nothing to threaten with, and to hope that the Member States will accept this legal constitutional responsibility that they have.

LITTLEJOHNS: As we do this programme, what is the debt owed to the UN?

SILLS: It's gotten better. If you take peace-keeping and the regular budget together, it's down significantly from what it was. I don't have the figures right at hand, but it was over $1 billion dollars a few months ago, and now it's under that considerably. The importance, though, of the fact that, if you're going to ask us to do peace-keeping operations, we have to have the resources to do these with, is something that can't be over-estimated enough.

LITTLEJOHNS: We have less than a minute left, Mr. Sills, but I'd like to ask you a fairly tough question, I guess. The new United States Congress is not known -- at least some of the members are not known for their friendship toward the United Nations. Is that going to be a problem?

SILLS: Well, we deal with governments, we deal with the overall policy of a government, and we deal with the United States like we deal with the other Member States. We don't deal with the House or the Senate or the Executive Branch separately. I'm aware of these statements. I genuinely hope that the leadership of the new Congress, as has been the case in the past, will look seriously at the programmes that we have and will come up with constructive criticism. And certainly that's something that we welcome. There are members on both the Senate and the House side that we've worked very closely with in the past that have been very supportive of the UN, and we hope that that will continue to be the case.

I think we've taken some significant steps recently in putting into place a new system that will make the UN more fiscally accountable, that will go after instances of malfeasance and the like, so I think that this will be very pleasing to the new Congress.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you think that will satisfy some of the severest critics?

SILLS: It may not satisfy the severest critics, but I think it will satisfy the critics who approach it from a constructive standpoint. We can always improve, we can always get better, and we certainly need to keep that in mind.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Sills, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this special edition of World Chronicle.

Our guest has been Joe Sills, Spokesman for the United Nations Secretary-General. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of World Chronicle.

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